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SOCIETY OF FRIENDS LIBRARY LONDON

STUBBORN FACTS;

OR,

A PLAIN STATEMENT

OF THE

PROCEEDINGS

OF A

PARTICULAR BAPTIST CHURCH,

WITH RESPECT TO

TWO OF THEIR MEMBERS,

Who were found *guilty* of

PRAYING, READING,

AND

Expounding the Scriptures,

IN THE VILLAGES,

Under the Patronage of the London Itinerant Society,

WITHOUT

A *regular* Call to the Work of the Ministry;

IN A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A FRIEND.

BY JOHN EDWARDS,

AUTHOR OF "A DEFENCE OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY, &c."

Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word, Your Brethren that hated you, and cast you out for my Name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed. ISAIAH lxvi. 5.

LONDON:

Printed by H. Teape, Tower-hill.

AND SOLD BY W. KENT, 116, HIGH HOLBORN.

1808.

Price 1s. 6d.

PREFACE.

IT may be proper to inform the reader, that the case detailed in the following statement, is the same with that referred to in page 30, of the pamphlet which I published in January, 1807, entitled, "A Defence of Christian Liberty, &c."

The mortification felt by the rulers of the Church of which my brother N— and myself were then members, was so great at seeing the absurdity of their conduct in that business exposed to public view, that they shortly after commenced a prosecution against us in *their Spiritual Court;* the limited powers of which will not suffer them to inflict a greater punishment than *Excommunication*, for the worst crimes that depraved beings are capable of committing. That punishment they have thought proper to inflict upon us*. Nor will this excite surprise in those who are acquainted with human nature. Idolaters in all ages of the world, and under every form of religion, have been persecutors. Throw down the altar of their Baal, and cut down the grove that is by it; strip it of every false covering; expose its native deformity; leave not the shadow of an argument to shelter it from deserved contempt; and its superstitious votaries will instantly become your implacable enemies. Who hath done this thing? will be the immediate inquiry; and the authors, or supposed authors of the mischief, will be sure to feel the effects of their resentment to the utmost extent of their ability to injure. The victims of their rage have then no adequate means of redress, but by appealing from their unjust sentence to the decision of an impartial public. In our case there is an additional reason for making such an appeal; as our characters have been wantonly attacked by an anonymous

* Such of my readers as will be at the pains of procuring the book alluded to (if not already in possession of it) will be able to judge for themselves, whether it contains any thing to merit so severe a sentence.

writer, who has thought proper to hold us up to the public as persons who are " haughty and obstinate," and such as ought to be cut off from the Churches to which they belong.

Such an appeal is also necessary in respect of the Itinerant Society, with which we are so closely connected, and which must otherwise suffer in the public estimation, by labouring under the *stigma* of employing persons, whom a *regular* Church has thought proper to *expel* from their communion.

It may be thought by some, that our subsequent admission into a Church of the same faith and order, is amply sufficient to wipe out the disgrace of being excluded from our former connexion. To this I answer, that so many and various have been the unfounded and injurious reports, industriously circulated against us, both in town and country, that it is highly probable that the greater part of those who are acquainted with this circumstance, may rather be disposed to form an unfavorable opinion of the Church which has received us, for admitting such unworthy characters among them as we are represented to be. It is therefore proper, in order to vindicate their conduct in this transaction, as well as our own character, to make known the real state of the case. But it is more especially due to the cause which we have undertaken to defend. The following simple statement of facts will tend more than a thousand arguments to shew the *nature* of the principle which we felt it our duty to oppose. The spirit of persecution never fails to injure, if not to ruin, that system, be it what it may, which it is employed to support. Hence the persecution in Queen Mary's days did more to overturn Popery, in this country, than all the writings of the reformers, by affording a striking proof of what Popery is, and shewing the genuine tendency of such a system. But for this it might still have been considered as a harmless thing; and few, if any, would have been persuaded to believe that its sanguinary statutes would ever be carried into execution. It is just so with a Church's call. It

is in itself a persecuting principle, diametrically opposite to the principle of Christian liberty. The only reason why it has hitherto done so little mischief is, because it has generally been suffered to lie *dormant*. It is well known, that there are in some of the most respectable Churches, persons who preach occasionally in workhouses, villages, and elsewhere, without a call; but they are *connived at:* the spirit of the principle is not called forth to oppose them. Most of our Churches seem satisfied with retaining the *image* of the beast, without attempting to put life into it. But, would you know the nature and properties of that beast, and what it is capable of effecting, you must see it not only alive, but awake and roused to action. You will then be convinced that it is, indeed, an evil beast, which ought to be taken and destroyed.

Some, perhaps, may be shocked at the idea of giving publicity to the subject of this narrative, under an apprehension of its proving injurious to the cause of religion, by exposing the faults of its professors. To this I would reply: Whilst we are walking in the path of duty, without manifesting an unbecoming spirit, or being influenced by improper motives, we need fear no consequences; but may cheerfully commit both our own cause, and the cause of God into his hands, who will maintain both as it shall seem good in his sight. As, on the one hand, we are not to do evil that good may come; so, on the other, we are not to refrain from good because evil may come. To diminish the influence of evil by exposing its malignity is to do good; for, in so doing, we promote the *real* interest of the cause we wish to serve. Purge out, therefore, the old leaven, says the apostle Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians: for the gospel feast is not to be kept with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness. But let us remember, that this old leaven is *hidden,* and must be *discovered* before it can be purged out. If an individual member errs or offends, the Church may judge him; but if the

Church itself fall into any error, either of doctrine or practice, who shall judge them? there is no way of effectually pointing out their errors, but by making the matter public: and yet this may be as necessary and proper for their correction, and for a warning to others, as any act of discipline which a particular Church may exercise within itself.

The objection I have endeavoured to answer will be urged, with peculiar force, by persons of our own denomination. There are too many of every name, who, though they discover very little zeal for the cause of Christ at large, are "tremblingly alive" for the credit of their own particular sect. What must the feelings of such persons be, to see the name of *their* party attached to a line of conduct egregiously improper, and the whole exposed to public view! Are we then to connive at sin in order to please a party? We ought, indeed, to love our neighbour as ourselves, (the extent and meaning of which precept is well explained by our Lord in the parable of the good Samaritan) but how, in certain cases, is this disposition to be exercised? Read Leviticus xix. 16—18. but, particularly, the 17th verse, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him." Were such faithfulness universally manifested, from proper motives, and in a proper spirit, without regard to sect or party, the improprieties and absurdities which disgrace various denominations of professing Christians, would be greatly lessened, if not totally removed. But so long as it is maintained, that folly or vice ought to be countenanced, or, at least, connived at, when found among persons of our own persuasion, there is very little reason to hope that matters will be much better than they are at present. As Protestants, we ought to protest against the errors, not only of the Church of Rome, but of every other Church, whether Baptist or Pedo-baptist, that presumes to ordain what God has not thought proper to command. Spiritual prosperity, which is the only true prosperity, is inseparably

connected with purity; and, if we attempt to promote the former at the expence of the latter, we shall find ourselves miserably deceived. After all, the most effectual way of increasing the spiritual prosperity of any particular community, is to have our hearts set upon the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom, and the interest of his cause at large. They shall prosper that love Zion. "Them that honour me (saith God) I will honour; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

Some apology may be necessary for the freedom which I have used, in pointing out the faults of a character so respectable as that of Mr. U—; the pastor of a Gospel Church, whose ministry has been made very useful in awakening sinners and instructing the ignorant in the first principles of religion; who is also acknowledged to possess a very amiable natural temper, besides many excellent qualities which place him deservedly high in the esimation of the public.

It is by no means my wish to detract from Mr. U—'s general character, or to lessen that esteem in which he is held by his numerous friends, and which I sincerely hope he will long continue to deserve. But, when any considerable impropriety of conduct appears in so respectable a character, it is highly proper that it should be made manifest, lest others should fall into the same error; thinking, as too many do, that they must be perfectly safe in following the example of so good a man. Alas! alas! they are not aware, that these good men sometimes act under the immediate influence of men that are not so good; like Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, and then, like him, they find themselves involved in difficulties, from which they know not how to escape. It is happy for us that the scriptures point out the faults of good men, as well as of other men. The sacred writers do not seem to feel that delicacy for which some contend. They animadvert with the utmost freedom upon their own failings, and upon those of others. I have endeavoured, in this narrative, to follow their example. It is

not my wish to exalt the character of one, and to degrade that of another, either friend or foe; but to present a statement of facts, in their true point of light, that the reader may form a just judgment of the whole. Nor have I attempted to draw a veil over my own faults; when my conduct has been such as to deserve rebuke.

That some persons will be offended at this publication there is not a single doubt: for every one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be discovered: but he that doth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest. Truth and goodness have nothing to fear from exposure. they rather court than shun investigation; whilst hypocrisy and wickedness are perpetually in fear of detection, and tremble at the idea of seeing things represented as they really are.

My design, however, in this plain statement of facts, is not so much to expose the misconduct of those who have erred, as to guard others against falling into similar errors. Let the rulers of Churches know, that if they presume to make public censure and Church discipline the engine of private malice and personal revenge, there is a tribunal, by a proper appeal to which, the reproach which they mean to cast upon others may be made to fall upon themselves.

I am happy to find that the sentiments advanced in my former publication are gaining ground every day. The prejudice at first excited against them has, in a great measure, subsided. Several churches, within my own knowledge, have already renounced the principle of a Church's call; and others, I have every reason to believe, are preparing to follow their example. The plan proposed, as a substitute for it, has, in various instances, been acted upon with very good effect. Nor is it presuming too much to hope that, in the course of a few years, this persecuting principle will be universally abandoned, and the pernicions practice, which is supported by it, be wholly laid aside.

STUBBORN FACTS.

LETTER I.

DEAR SIR,

IT may be proper to apprize you, that the occurrences which I am about to narrate, took place in Mr. U—'s Church. I joined that Church in 1797, and my friend N— in 1798. The circumstances which led him to join the Church are deserving particular attention. He had been for several years a member of the Church under the pastoral care of Mr. M—, and might have continued so to the present day, had they not thought proper to make a law, which forbade every one in their communion to engage in ministerial labours, without a previous call from the Church to the work of the ministry. This led Mr. N— to examine the Scriptures on the subject. The result was, a full conviction that the practice referred to was antiscriptural, and that making a law to establish that practice was antichristian; that it was an invasion of the prerogative of Jesus Christ, who is the *sole* Lawgiver of his Church, and possesses the exclusive right to call whom he pleases to labour in his vineyard; that it was also a violation of the rights of conscience, by which every man is at full liberty to employ his talents in the service of God, wherever

Divine Providence shall open a door of usefulness*. With those views he determined to quit the Church with which he had been so long united, though he was in habits of close intimacy with some of the most respectable of the members, for whom he still entertains a very high esteem. But where conscience is concerned, we are not to confer with flesh and blood. He, accordingly, applied for communion to the Church under the care of Mr. U—. Two of the deacons were appointed to converse with him, one of whom, in the course of conversation, observed that, in their Church, no such law as that of which he complained, was in existence or in contemplation. Mr. U—, for his own satisfaction, waited on Mr. M—, from whom he doubtless received a fair statement of the business. Neither Mr. M— nor the Church under his care, threw any obstacle in the way of an honourable dismission, which, after a full investigation of the matter, was in due time obtained; and Mr. U—, in giving Mr. N— the right hand of fellowship on his approach to the table, publicly declared, in the presence of the Church and congregation, his *full* satisfaction respecting the grounds of Mr. N—'s leaving his former connexion.

Notwithstanding the explicit declaration Mr. N— had made of his sentiments respecting the call of a Church, he did not think proper at that time to act upon them, or to exercise himself that right which he had so strenuously claimed for others, though repeatedly and earnestly solicited so to do, by the London Itinerant Society; being in habits of intimate friendship with the first founders of that laudable institution.

* See a "Defence of Christian Liberty, &c." (in which this subject is treated of at large) advertised at the end of this book.

In the year 1802, I was frequently at Wimbledon, (my native place) a village into which the Society had introduced the Gospel. I went on the Lord's Day to the room where the meeting was held. Being once perceived by a friend, to whom I was known, I was urgently pressed to give the exhortation that morning. After some hesitation, I complied. This was repeated three times in the course of a few months. Tidings of these things soon came to the ears of Mr. U—, who, as my pastor, thought proper to converse with and reprove me, for acting a part so *disorderly*. I made the best apology I could, and submitted to the reproof.

On mentioning this circumstance to my friend N—, he advised me to search the Scriptures on the subject, and abide by their decission. I did so, and the consequence was, not finding in the sacred volume any trace of the practice on which so much stress has been laid, I determined to pay no regard to it, but to make the word of God, and not the inventions of men, the rule of my future conduct.

Shortly after, I formed a closer connexion with some of the leading members of the Itinerant Society, and in the month of August, 1804, complied with their request to assist them in the villages. In the month of November in the same year, Mr. N— was prevailed upon to unite with his brethren in these labours of love. We counted the cost before we took this step. Knowing the practice of most if not all the Churches in our denomination, we concluded that we should meet with much opposition, and that in all probability, at one time or other, and under one pretence or other, we should be excluded from the Church to which we then

belonged. The event has proved that our conjecture was too well founded.

We acquainted Mr. U— with the plan of our proceedings, the principle on which we acted, and the nature and extent of our engagements, to which he made no objection. On the contrary, he professed himself a friend to village preaching, highly approved of the object of the society, and wished us success in the name of the Lord, assuring us that *we should never meet with any obstruction from him.* Nor need this be wondered at, when it is recollected, that he is himself an itinerant preacher, and appears when engaged in that work, to enter into the spirit of the business. But, whatever *his* private sentiments and disposition might be, those of the leading members of his Church, were decidedly hostile to our proceedings, especially in respect of the society with which we were connected. They had three distinct grounds of enmity and opposition.—1st. As *High Calvinists.*—2nd. As *Strict Baptists;* and 3rd. As *Strenuous advocates for a Church's call.* In the first of these characters, as *High Calvinists,* they could not shew friendship to those who held that the invitations of the gospel were general and indefinite, addressed to sinners of every description. They knew this to be our sentiment, and might conclude that our practice would correspond with it. Secondly, as *Strict Baptists,* they could not find in their hearts to countenance the preaching of the gospel *out of their own denomination**. Lastly, as *Strenuous advocates for a Church's call,* our

* This is not intended to convey any reflection on the denomination in general. We are happy to bear testimony to the laudable zeal of many respectable characters among them, especially such as are closely connected with the Baptist Missionary Society.

presuming to speak in public without *taking orders* from them, appeared to imply a contempt for their authority, which they could not bear. What was to be done in this case? How were they to proceed? Had it been left solely to them, they would have decided the business, by cutting us off at once, for going without their call. But this, Mr. U— would not consent to. He well knew that if we were excluded from *his* Church for itinerating in the villages, it would materially injure his reputation with the Methodists; among whom he was held in such high estimation, for his liberality, candour and zeal for the cause at large. More than twelve months elapsed before this knotty point could be settled. All this time we were quietly pursuing our course; regularly filling up our place in the Church, when not engaged in village exercises (which was never more than twice in the month) and behaving with the same respect to the pastor, the deacons, and the private members of the Church, as we had been ever accustomed to do.

In the meanwhile Mr. U—, and Mr. S—, (one of the deacons) were privately using their utmost efforts to overcome our scruples, and prevail with us to speak before the Church, and submit to their decision. This we positively refused to do, for the reasons which have been already assigned *. Whether we were right or wrong in so doing, it was with us a matter of conscience; we considered their practice as antiscriptural,

* We told them that if they only wished to form a judgment of our talents, there were other ways of proceeding; and that, though we could not consent to speak before the Church *as a Church*; yet, if they desired it, we would afford them the opportunity of hearing us in their individual capacity. This, however, they declined, their object evidently not being to obtain satisfaction, but to establish their authority.

and that it would be sinful in us to comply with it. Until, therefore, they could prove from the word of God the impropriety of our conduct, they ought at least to have let us alone; especially, as we were satisfied with simply following the path of duty for ourselves, without the least attempt to make proselytes to our opinion, or to disturb the peace of the Church in any way whatever.

I am,

Yours, &c.

LETTER II.

DEAR SIR,

The injurious tendency of the *principle* which we opposed to the cause of religion at large, will fully appear in the *practice* of the Church in our case. I have already observed that we were peaceably following the dictates of our conscience in the path of duty. But this would not satisfy some of the leading men in the Church to which we belonged. They were determined at all events to make it a Church business. Accordingly, in the month of July, 1806, Mr. N— was waited upon by two of the deacons, with a message from the Church, importing that it was their wish that he should exercise his gifts before them *as a Church,*

in order *that they might judge* of the propriety of his continuing to preach in the villages, or enlarging the sphere of his labours. His reply to the messengers in their official capacity, was precisely the same with what he had already told Mr. S— (who was one of them) in private.

In the following month, I was visited by the same messengers, and for the same purpose. In the course of conversation, Mr. S— was particularly severe on such societies as Tabernacle, Surry Chapel, &c. He would not allow them to be churches. They were " a motley groupe, a religious rabble, &c." I said but little in reply, but told him that I had put my answer in writing, with which he seemed pleased. The following is a copy of it.

Dear christian friends,

In answer to the message which you have communicated to me, I beg leave to say, that I have not the least objection to afford to the Church all the satisfaction they can desire through the medium of messengers; but, as to my speaking before them *as a Church*, in order that they may judge of my talents, I am free to declare that I cannot accede to it. The exercise of talents of every kind and in every degree, in which they may be possessed, I conceive to be a matter of *personal* responsibility; for which every one of us must *individually* account when called to appear at the judgment seat of Christ. (See the parable of the talents, Matt. xxv. 14—30, particularly that part of it which relates to the unprofitable servant.) Nor does it appear to me, that any man or body of men, have a

right to interfere, except where the exercise of such talent or supposed talent, shall appear to be disgraceful to religion, and injurious to the cause which it professes to serve; but then, I conceive there ought to be clear and undeniable evidence, that this *is* the fact, *before* such interference can be justifiable, either from reason or scripture.

As to the prevailing idea of the call of a Church being previously necessary to constitute a public preacher, it appears to me to be no less than an invasion of the divine prerogative; seeing it is the exclusive right of the Lord of the harvest to send forth labourers into *his* harvest. It is also a manifest infringement of christian liberty, which does not appear from the word of God to be so restricted. Not under the old testament; (see Numb. xi. 27, 29.—Jer. xxiii. 28,) and much less under the gospel dispensation.

With such views of the subject, I cannot but conclude that to comply with the request of the Church on this occasion would *in me be sinful*, as, in so doing, I should countenance the practice of those who appear to pay a greater regard to the customs of their churches and the traditions of their elders, than to the sacred oracles. I beg the Church may be assured that in saying this, I mean no disrespect to their *proper* authority. I am only acting in obedience to the dictates of conscience, and according to what I believe is agreeable to the word of God, in opposition to the inventions of men.

August 3d, 1806. I am, &c.

Messrs. S— and B—. J. E—.

On the following church-meeting, (August 18th,) the above answer was received on behalf of us both and entered in the Church books. As soon as it was read, Mr. S— rose. After declaiming, for a considerable time, on the impropriety of conceited persons taking it in their heads to preach; being the *sole* judges of their own abilities, and sending themselves, &c. &c. &c. he concluded by observing, that those friends (alluding to us) he understood were employed by a Society. Who they were, or what they were, that composed this society he knew not; but he believed they were a "motley groupe." This scurrilous expression roused the indignation of my friend, and threw him completely off his guard. Having the plan of the Itinerant Society with the names of the Committee in his pocket, he instantly produced it, and declared before them all that he esteemed the sanction of those respectable names more than he should the call of ten such Churches as theirs *.

Mr. U— now grew extremely warm, and set himself to oppose us both with all his might, but was particularly severe on brother N—. Every expression that was used by him, apparently disrespectful to the Church, he considered as personally reflecting on him, and made it an occasion of offence. Mr. N— declared in the strongest terms that he had no such idea, and that if he had uttered a syllable which could be so

* Those who know the materials of which this Church is composed, and will only contrast them with the list of the Committee of the London Itinerant Society, must instantly see that such an expression is far from being too strong; though some may probably question the prudence, or even the propriety of Mr. N—'s employing it, at the time and in the way above stated, as it was certainly calculated to irritate rather than to convince. All truths are not to be spoken at all times,

construed, he was ready to ask his pardon. Upon these repeated assurances, Mr. U— at length said, "I am satisfied." The greatest part of the evening was occupied in these very unpleasant altercations. How just the observation of Solomon, and how seasonable his advice: "The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water; therefore leave off contention before it be meddled with." What good end could be answered by agitating this question before the Church? They knew our sentiments respecting their authority in such matters, and might suppose that we should treat it with the contempt that it deserved; and with which all human laws ought to be treated, when they invade the prerogative of God, and attempt to fetter conscience, of which he alone is the Sovereign Lord.

At the close of the debate this evening, Mr. U— introduced a string of resolutions, which were ultimately adopted by the Church. The following is a copy of them.

I.—That we as a Church have no desire to invade the rights of conscience, infringe Christian Liberty, or prevent the exercise of talents, by which the glory of God, and the good of immortal souls may be promoted. Our design was to give our brethren N— and E— an opportunity of speaking before us, to give an opportunity to judge of the propriety of their exercising their talents in a more public way, or of continuing to employ them as they have hitherto done, with the approbation of the Church.

II.—That in order in future to give our brethren an opportunity of exercising any talent, which the Great

Head of the Church may be pleased to bestow, a Conference Meeting be held once a month, and that it be confined to the Members.

III.—That as the Church have thus explicitly and publicly expressed their willingness to encourage talents, according to the measure in which a Sovereign God may be pleased to bestow them; in order to prevent any contention in time to come, it be affectionately recommended to all our brethren in future, not to commence public instructors in villages or elsewhere, without giving the Church an opportunity of hearing them, either at a Conference Meeting, or at any other meeting appointed for that purpose.

IV.—That in respect to our brethren E— and N—, our object in requesting them to speak before the Church, was not to force them into the public ministry, nor to embarrass them as to their present exercises, but only what is expressed in our first resolution. We therefore consider that our request to them was respectful, reasonable, and agreeable to the word of God, and (we are happy to add) according to the sentiments of many of our brethren in town and country: as we most cordially approve the following quotation from a circular letter addressed to several Baptist Churches, and published in 1796.

"It is not sufficient however that individual Members press after those things which may enable them to do good to others; the Churches must become nurseries of their gifts. Bold, ignorant, and conceited characters may be found it is true, who need something very different from encouragement; but men of modesty and worth will not push themselves forward: they must be sought out and brought forth, or you may expect

them to pass their valuable lives in obscurity. Every man that hath received the gift is commanded to minister the same as a good steward of the manifold grace of God; but no man is a competent judge of his own gifts. Some, through excess of diffidence, will underestimate them, and others, from a contrary temper of mind, will draw an opposite conclusion. Hence, it becomes the duty of Churches, while they exercise a proper disregard to those who aspire after things to which they are incompetent, to watch the growth of talents in worthy characters, and encourage them." But, as our brethren have declared that they do not wish to be considered as public ministers, and that they cannot accede to our request, without sinning against God; we therefore leave them to the disposal of the Lord Jesus Christ, praying that he may direct them in time to come as to the exercise of their talents, in the same way in which they have been accustomed to exercise them, and according to their own request.

Such were their resolutions.—The glaring inconsistency between the first and the third, must strike the most superficial observer. The pretended *affectionate recommendation* of the latter is too thin a veil to conceal the yoke that it imposes upon conscience. The last resolution seems evidently intended as a kind of *bonus* or *douceur*; a sort of bribe to bring us over to their party, and silence any opposition we might be disposed to make to the resolution immediately preceding. It should seem as though they were weak enough to believe, that by giving us liberty to act according to the dictates of our own conscience, they laid us under an obligation to acknowledge their claim to dominion over the consciences of others; and that,

if we were set free ourselves, we should acquiesce, if not assist in forging chains for our brethren. But they could not, or would not understand the ground of our opposition. We contended from first to last *for principle*; and the gross violation of principle contained in the third resolution, was more offensive to us than any of their former proceedings. It was particularly so to brother N—, who left his former connexion on account of their passing a similar resolution.

Finding the principle which we conscientiously opposed, not only maintained in argument, but established by law, we came to the resolution of removing our communion, as soon as we could find a Church to which we might be comfortably united, and who were willing to admit us on our own principles. We had reason to believe Mr. R— would have no objection, and that we should be happy in connexion with him. He was not a stranger, having been a member of the same Church with us previous to his removal to H——. He was a man of a liberal mind. His sentiments on religious subjects were congenial with our own, and (as it afterwards appeared in conversation) he entertained the same views of a Church's call. Brother N— waited on him, and was cordially received. He cheerfully acquiesced in the proposal for our uniting with them in church fellowship, but expressed a wish to maintain a good understanding with Mr. U—, his former pastor. This, Mr. N— wished as much as himself, and accordingly proposed to see Mr. U—, and inform him of our intentions. He did so. Mr. U— seemed surprised, and said that *he considered every thing that had passed as buried in oblivion*;

but that if we must separate, he hoped it would be in friendship. He afterwards told Mr. R— that he did not wish to part with us; which Mr. R— considered as kind and friendly.

On renewing the application to Mr. R— a short time afterward, difficulties were started in reference to our views of a Church's call. Mr. R— himself approved of our sentiments; but his deacons were inimical to them. He therefore proposed to brother N— to converse with them on the subject; and if their objections were removed, no obstacle would remain. Mr. N— accordingly waited on them. The interview lasted about two hours; and appeared to end, as most controversies do, with leaving each of the parties in full possession of his own opinion.

As they were about to part, brother N— said, "I now see more than ever the necessity of publishing our sentiments to the world, and waiting the result. It will then be seen whether the practice, for which you contend, can be maintained on the ground of fair argument or not."

Mr. N— knew that I had begun to write on the subject with a view to publication, if necessary. That necessity was now absolute. We could not, either comfortably or conscientiously continue in our present connexion, and every other door seemed to be shut against us, on account of our peculiar principles. I therefore published a pamphlet on the 1st of January, 1807, entitled "A Defence of Christian Liberty, &c.*"

While the work was in hand, I informed Mr. U— of my intentions. He replied that he was a friend to

* See the advertisement at the end of this Book.

free inquiry, and added, that he supposed when it was published he would be entitled to a copy. I promised to send him one, which I accordingly did, accompanied with a letter, of which the following is a Copy:

Dear Sir,

Agreeably to my promise, I send you a copy of the "Defence of Christian Liberty." When you have perused it, I shall be obliged by your free opinion of its contents. You will perceive, from the arguments which are therein adduced, that I have *thought* much on the subject. I can assure you that I have *read* much, both in the scriptures and elsewhere; and I have also *prayed* much, that both you and I, and the Church of which we form a part, may ever be directed to such measures as may be conducive to the glory of God, and the good of his people. The work is now before the public, and they will judge of its merits, and its defects. I have only to repeat my request, that, if in the perusal of it, you should discover any thing which may appear to you to be erroneous, you will have the goodness to point it out to me.

I am, &c.

January 2, 1807. J. E.

You will be agreeably surprized when I inform you, that a very short time after the book appeared, we received a very friendly note from two of the deacons of the Church at H—. It was to request an interview, which took place soon afterwards at my house. They acted with a degree of candour and kindness that does them great honour. They told us, that they had attentively considered the arguments

which my friend N— had used in conversation; that they were nearly convinced of their truth before the book appeared; but that the perusal of the book had fully satisfied them that we were right in the principle, which they now readily concurred in; declaring, that their practice, as a Church, should henceforth entirely correspond with it. They also gave us a friendly invitation to join their Church, every obstruction on their part being now done away. After thanking them for their candour and liberality, we told them, that we thought it likely that our Church would take up the business again, and as we had stood the event of their resolutions, we were determined to abide by the final issue of their proceedings. That if we left them now, they might say, we had sculked away for fear of consequences, and that if we applied for a dismission, it would probably be refused.

They were of opinion, that under these circumstances, it would be proper for us to wait. Nothing further was done in that affair for some time.

About the middle of February, we received the afflictive intelligence of the sudden death of Mr. R—. This solemn event appeared to us very mysterious as well as afflictive. How far it might operate to prevent our uniting with that Church, we could not tell; nor what further consequences might ensue, either in the event of our joining them, or going elsewhere.

I shall close this letter by observing, that we received flattering testimonies of approbation of the principle of the book, from many respectable characters, both Ministers and private Christians, in our own as well as in other denominations. An answer was advertised in February, and appeared a few days previous to the

Church-meeting, concerning which, I need only observe, that none are more ashamed of it than those in defence of whose principles it is professedly written. For a just and impartial character of this pamphlet, as well as of my own, I would refer you to a review of both, which appeared in the Theological Magazine for April following.

I am, &c.

LETTER III.

DEAR SIR,

I informed you in my last, that on the publication of the book, I sent a copy to Mr. U—, at his own request, accompanied with a note, begging to know his opinion of the contents, and expressing a wish he would point out any thing he might conceive to be erroneous in it. To this no answer was returned, nor any intimation given of his sentiments on the subject (except by the total alteration of his carriage towards me) till the month of February, when a vote of censure was brought into the Church, with a view to exclude us both, for the book which I had published. I should have observed before, that Mr. S— had previously waited on me in private, to ascertain *who was the author of the book.* I distinctly told him (which is

the fact) that *I was the sole author*, and that I was not afraid of any discussion on its contents. Notwithstanding this explicit declaration, they were pleased to include us both (as noticed above) when they brought in their vote of censure, which was moved by Mr. S— himself.

You will probably be surprized at their taking such a step, under such circumstances; but when you are acquainted with the secret history of this transaction, your wonder will subside. The fact is, Mr. N— was the principal object of their enmity. The contempt with which he had treated that authority, which was their idol, by declaring, in their presence, that he should esteem the sanction of the London Itinerant Society, more than the call of ten such Churches as theirs, was in their estimation a crime never to be forgiven. That such was the disposition of their minds towards him, I cannot entertain a single doubt, when I recollect the manner in which Mr. U— was in the habit of speaking of him, both to myself and others. Mr. U— seemed indeed as if he wished to separate between us, for while he was passing flattering encomiums on me, professing his full satisfaction with my conduct*, he was loading him with reproach. He even went so far as to say, that if a member of any other Church had used such an expression as that above alluded to, and were afterwards to apply to him for communion, *he would refuse him.* Now you will please to observe, that this was shortly after he had told Mr. N— in private, that *he considered every thing that had passed as buried in oblivion.* Such conduct needs no comment.

* This was previous to the publication of the book.

There was, moreover, another reason for their wishing to include both of us in the same censure. It is an invariable custom in that Church (and I suppose in other regular Churches) when a member is *under censure* to request him to withdraw, as soon as his case is brought forward for discussion; by which means he is prevented from hearing what is said against him, and deprived of the opportunity of vindicating himself. The propriety or impropriety of this practice it is not my present business to decide upon. I shall only remark, that it would have answered a very important purpose for them at this time, could they have carried their point, to have shut us both out during the discussion on the book; as they well knew there was not one in the Church beside, capable of defending it, or disposed to do so. They were therefore determined if possible to include brother N— in their vote of censure; though they had no foundation for charging him with being the author, but mere conjecture; and that, in the face of the most positive declarations to the contrary.

It is proper to inform you, that though their censure was principally levelled at the book, it was not confined to that, but embraced a variety of *other things*; such as non-attendance on their social prayer meetings, irregular attendance on the Lord's day, and refusing to speak before them as a Church, &c. &c. Now, trivial as these extra charges may appear, and every one of them capable of a satisfactory answer even on their own principles, the introduction of them here was extremely convenient, as they were admirably adapted to facilitate the accomplishment of their design, while they furnished a ready answer to objections that might otherwise have perplexed them. If, for instance, any

one of our friends out of the Church, who had read and approved the book, should cry shame on their conduct for cutting us off on such a ground as that, they might immediately reply: "My friend, you mistake the matter; there are *other things* which you are not acquainted with; if you knew the whole, you would justify the conduct of the Church." This accumulation of charges might also tend to reconcile the minds of their own members, to concur in a vote of exclusion upon the whole taken together, though probably some of them might be ready to think there was not much stress to be laid on any one charge separately considered. The principal actors in this business seem to have had their eye upon that famous maxim of the Jesuits, "Throw a great deal of dirt, and some will stick." It is worthy of remark, that one of the charges thus exhibited against us, (refusing to speak before the Church) relates to that which they themselves *had permitted*; viz. that we might continue to preach in villages without a call.

When you have advanced thus far in the narrative, methinks I hear you exclaim, "Well, to be sure! according to your statement of the affair, the conduct of the Church is bad indeed! but, are you altogether without blame? have you never betrayed any improper temper, or spoken unadvisedly with your lips through the whole of this unpleasant affair? We generally say, there are faults on both sides; and, in most disputes (if not all) this is the fact. Those of us who know what human nature is, expect to find it so; and we are not very likely to be disappointed; though it too often happens that neither the one party nor the other, will acknowledge that he has done any thing amiss. Now you have

pointed out the impropriety of Mr. U—'s conduct, and have more than once glanced at an unguarded expression of your friend's, but not a syllable has yet transpired respecting any fault of yours."

Had you suffered me, my dear friend, to proceed without interruption, those cutting observations might have been spared; for I was just about to relate a circumstance, in which I acknowledge I was much, very much to blame. I never can reflect upon it but with the deepest regret, and am truly sorry that I should have acted so improperly. You will recollect my having informed you that our opponents at first thought proper to include Mr. N—'s name in their vote of censure. I saw their object in so doing, and opposed it with all my might, repeating the declaration, that I was the sole author of the book, and alone responsible for its contents. I pressed them so closely on the subject of separating the two cases, that at length Mr. S— said, that as he did not wish to confound the innocent with the guilty, he would consent to drop Mr. N—'s case *for the present*, and to alter the motion so as to confine it to me only. This was accordingly done, though apparently, with extreme reluctance. With this alteration, however, they seemed determined to carry their point. I now felt myself in a very painful situation, without a single friend, and in the midst of a host of enemies, about to be held up to the whole world, as a person unworthy of Christian fellowship; for I knew that their vote of censure was a mere preface to a vote of exclusion, which would follow of course. I was particularly stung with the reflection, that my pastor, who ought to have protected me at this time, was (as it appeared to me) exerting

all his influence against me, both in the Church and out of it. Under these impressions, I rose and said "That I wished to warn the Church of the consequences which might result from these proceedings, (*i. e.* their charges against me) for which consequences those who had brought them forward must alone be answerable. It was not my wish to bring the affair before them at any time; but, if I must answer for my conduct, it would be necessary for me to lay before them a variety of circumstances, of which they could have little expectation. That they must be acquainted with the secret history of this affair before it came to a public hearing, and with the subsequent conduct of no less a person than their pastor: that I was in possession of facts, indubitable, incontrovertible facts, at which their ears would tingle; and which must be disclosed if these accusations against me were persisted in. It was by no means my wish to introduce them to public view. I had much to say to Mr. U— in private; but as he had thought proper to hold me at arm's length, and to attack my character, and endeavour to ruin my reputation, I should feel it indispensibly necessary to lay the whole case before them: and I knew it was in my power to place his conduct, in some parts of this affair, in such a light as I apprehended would do him no credit. I repeated, that I was very averse to the public agitation of those things to which I had alluded; but, if those charges were allowed to pass, I should be obliged to do so in my own defence; and, if Mr. U— could clear himself before them and the public, from those things which I should lay to his charge, it would be well."

These expressions were uttered with all the force and point which I was capable of giving them. I do not

attempt to justify either the words themselves or the manner in which they were spoken. I am aware that they were calculated to do a great deal of mischief.

When I sat down, Mr. S— rose and said, that he would not be intimidated by such blind charges, and that he would persist in his motion. Mr. U— said, he did not know what circumstances I referred to; but as I had said I wished to see him in private, he should be glad to see me at any time. I replied, "No, sir, I said that I certainly did wish to talk over these things in private; but, as you have thought proper to proceed publicly against me, our discussions must now be entirely public."

The original vote of censure against me was then put and carried. The various items included in it have been already noticed. It concludes with resolving, "That on these grounds, messengers should be appointed to *reprove* me; and if I submitted to the reproof, to admonish me to fill up my place."

I remain, &c.

LETTER IV.

DEAR SIR,

IN my last letter you were acquainted with the proceedings of the Church, and the vote of censure which they passed against me. On the Friday following, I sent a letter to Mr. U—, of which the following is a copy:

Sir,

AS the paper which you read at the Church-meeting, containing several distinct articles of charge against me, is of such great length as is impossible to be retained in memory, I request the favour of a copy of it, which I find to be absolutely necessary to enable me to prepare my defence. I shall be further obliged, if I receive it by to-morrow noon. I am going out of town at that time for five or six days, and shall have more leisure to consider its contents during my absence from home, than I can possibly have at any other time, previous to the next Church-meeting. The bearer shall call for it at any hour to-morrow morning that you will appoint; or, if more agreeable to you, I will save you the trouble of writing it by calling at your house this evening, and taking the copy, either from the original paper, or from the Church-book. When I have perused the paper, I may possibly make some communication to you, previous to the Church-meeting.

I am, &c.

February 20, 1807. J. E—.

To this letter I received the following answer.

Sir,

On account of the peculiarity of my situation, in consequence of what you said at the close of our last Church-meeting, I do not consider myself at liberty to communicate the contents of the paper to which you refer. The Church have put the business into the hands of messengers: to them I think it proper to refer you.

I have concluded to recommend to the Church next Lord's day, to call a special meeting next Monday week, upon account of the reflections cast upon me.

I am, &c.

February 21, 1807. J. U—.

Soon after receiving this letter I began to reflect on the step I had taken, and the consequences that might probably result from it. I saw clearly that I had acted wrong; that I had thrown the Church into a ferment; and that the expressions which I had employed, might prove injurious to Mr. U— even in his *moral* character, of which I had not the smallest idea when the words were uttered. How much better would it have been, to have stated at the time clearly and explicitly (as I was afterwards compelled to do) what those things were in Mr. U—'s conduct, of which I had a right to complain; and then, whatever the decision of the Church might have been respecting him, no blame could have attached to me. But the question was, What is to be done now? The answer is obvious. If you have done wrong, and are sensible of it, confess it, and do what you ought to have done at first. This was, indeed, the only course which I could take with propriety. Accordingly, when the time came, and I was called upon to bring forward my charges (as they termed them) against Mr. U—, I began with acknowledging the impropriety of my conduct in using the expressions which occasioned the calling of that meeting. However strong those expressions might appear, and whatever ideas they might excite in the minds of some, I could assure them that I had nothing whatever to alledge against Mr. U—'s *moral* character, or his *general* character. It was only his conduct respecting us in particular, in reference to the business before the Church, that furnished the grounds of *complaint* (for such I wished them to be considered rather than as charges).

Being called upon by them thus publicly to state those grounds, I begged a patient and candid hearing. I

began with noticing Mr. U—'s behaviour towards me, since the publication of the book; stating, that up to that time (as he himself acknowledged) he had no complaint against me: but it was now evident he had taken offence. The rule of duty in such cases was plain: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother: but if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established: and if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the Church, &c." (See Matt. xviii. 15—17.) Now, instead of attending to this rule, Mr. U— had held me at arm's length, and endeavoured to avoid speaking to me, though I had particularly requested his opinion of the book.—That it was his duty as a christian, and especially as my pastor, to have given me private admonition or reproof, before he proceeded to call for the censure of the Church against me:—that so far from wishing to give him offence, we had always been particularly careful to avoid it, and had not taken one step, in the whole affair, without acquainting him.

It was said, in answer to this, that the text alluded to, had no reference to the subject; that it related solely to private or *personal* offences; but that my offence (the book) was against the whole Church, (and indeed the whole denomination) which materially altered the case. Brother N— observed in reply, that though he was far from admitting that this rule of our Lord was meant to be restricted to personal offences, yet, even on that ground, it was evident that whatever the *nature* of the offence might be, abstractedly considered, Mr. U— had made it *personal* to himself, by indulging towards

his offending brother all the feelings of *personal resentment*, and behaving in a way calculated to excite similar feelings in him. The admission of the principle for which they now contended would convert the censure of the Church (which ought never to be resorted to till all other means had been tried in vain) into an engine of private malice, and personal revenge. The Church however was not disposed to view the matter in this light. They, therefore, resolved, that this charge (for such they would have it to be) was altogether groundless.

I next adverted to Mr. U—'s conduct in publishing out of the Church what was transacted in it, after repeatedly enjoining it on the members, not to mention what was said or done at a Church meeting, even to a fellow member: that by thus giving his own statement of the affair, our case was often prejudged in those situations where we had not the means of vindicating ourselves.

He recollected the circumstances to which I alluded, and admitted the truth of my statement; but added, by way of apology, that when difficult cases occurred, it was a privilege to have the advice of friends, for whose judgment we entertain a respect; but that, if the Church thought he had acted wrong in this matter, he would submit to their reproof. On this question, they resolved, that he was censurable in a slight degree; but that they were satisfied with the concessions which he had made.

The last thing that I mentioned, was in reference to a book, entitled, " A reply to the Layman, &c." in which we were held up to the public as " haughty and obstinate;" and represented as persons who *ought to be*

cut off from the Churches to which they belonged. I observed that I had no positive proof, but I certainly had strong presumptive evidence, that Mr. U— was the author of that book. I added that I was informed that if I was excluded, on account of what I had published, I might have an action of damages, and that the printer would be obliged to give up his author. To this, Mr. U— replied, that so far from being himself the author of the book alluded to, he did not really know who was the author. This ground of complaint, therefore, was completely done away.

I was then asked, whether this was *the whole* of what I had to bring forward, or if any thing was kept back, as they wished to know *all* that I had to say against Mr. U—. I replied, that I had stated *the whole* of what I considered as grounds of complaint. Upon which Mr. B— moved, "That in conseqence of my having brought forward charges which I could not sustain, messengers be appointed, to *converse with* and reprove me, for the hasty and intemperate language which I had uttered at the last Church-meeting, reflecting upon the character of Mr. U—."

When this was passed, I repeated in still stronger terms my regret at having used such language, and proposed to make a similar acknowledgment to Mr. U— in private, and also to the messengers. Mr. N— expressed the satisfaction which he felt at seeing this question, which seemed so likely to introduce a scene of discord and confusion, apparently brought to an amicable termination. Mutual concessions were made and accepted. Those that were offered by Mr. U— where the Church thought him to blame, were received and entered on the minutes; and messengers were appointed to receive

such as I might be disposed to make, agreeably to what I had already expressed to the Church, and with which at that time they seemed satisfied. In this apparent spirit of conciliation we parted.

I now flattered myself that this question was virtually settled. Accordingly, I waited on Mr. U— the next evening, by appointment, to offer my concessions to him, agreeably to what I had proposed at the hurch-meeting the night before. I did this in the stronges and fullest terms I could make use of. I told him that I felt the deepest regret on the account, and that this arose from a full conviction that I had sinned in the sight of God and man;—that I was sensible that the words were calculated to injure him, and I sincerely asked his pardon for having uttered them;—that I intended to make a similar apology to the messengers, and also to the Church, at their next meeting;—that I wished to make reparation for the fault I had committed, and that such reparation should be as public as the offence had been. To all this Mr. U— made but little reply, except suggesting a doubt of my sincerity. I should have informed you, that on my first entrance he received me with the utmost coldness, and even refused to see me, but in the presence of a third person. Mrs. U— was therefore present to hear every thing that passed.

Notwithstanding the pain I felt at a reception so very different from what I had anticipated the evening before, I still determined to pursue the plan which I had previously resolved to follow at this interview; accordingly, after making the above acknowledgments, I proposed an amicable adjustment of the whole matter in d spute between us. I alluded chiefly to the general question, or the original ground of censure respecting the book, &c.

(considering the other as done away by the concessions which I had made.) I stated, that as our connexion must immediately cease, it appeared to me far better that we should part amicably, than otherwise. I pointed out the impossibility of their sustaining the charges against me, and the impropriety of their condemning me unheard. I told him that the censure of the Church, on the ground of the book, would do me no injury, and that we had been invited to join the Church at H—, on our own principles: that in all probability this union would take place, whether I was excluded or not:—that exclusion therefore could answer no purpose but to keep alive the flame of discord, &c. all which he now had it in his power to avoid, by recommending it to the Church to give me a dismission. As to Mr. N— they could not refuse it, as there was no charge existing against him.

To all this he replied, That *he could not conceive how I could reasonably expect a dismission, after having treated the Church as I had done in the book; and he would not recommend it to the Church to give me a dismission.* From this declaration two things are evident: First, that my exclusion was already determined upon; "How can you expect a dismission?" Secondly, that whatever the *pretence* might be, the book constituted the *real* ground of such a determination, "How can you expect a dismission, *after what you have published in the book?*"

Fruitless as this interview may appear to have been, I have no reason to regret that it took place, or to repent of having made, even under such discouraging circumstances, the request to obtain a dismission, as it gave me the opportunity of learning, by what fell from Mr. U—'s own lips, what was the determination of his

friends, respecting me, and to what cause my subsequent exclusion must necessarily be attributed. In my next, I shall make some further observations on this subject. In the mean time, I remain,

Yours, &c.

LETTER V.

DEAR SIR,

IN my last, I informed you of the very unfavorable result of my interview with Mr. U—, and what appears to have been the determination of his friends respecting me at that time. I would now remark, that though the book was unquestionably the real ground of offence which made them determine to exclude me, it did not suit them, circumstanced as they then were, to make that the *ostensible* ground; for the question with them in cases of this nature, is not simply what is right, but what is expedient; not what ought to be done in justice, but what may be done with safety. Now, having it in their power to choose their own ground, they had motives sufficient to induce them to prefer cutting me off on the particular question which was before them, rather than on the original vote of censure.

In the first place, it would be a greater injury to my

reputation, and consequently prove a more effectual bar to my uniting with any other Church, which was one of the principal objects they had in view in my exclusion. Secondly, it would furnish Mr. U— with the means of vindicating the conduct of the Church to his Methodist friends, who would have been shocked at the idea (especially such of them as had seen and approved of the book) of any member of a gospel Church being excommunicated for itinerant and lay preaching. Lastly, they had another motive for so doing, and that perhaps weighed more with them than all the rest. The scene was changed since the original vote of censure was brought in. Their object at that time was, by laying both of us under censure, to shut us both out of the Church, when the discussion respecting the book should come forward. (See page 27.) That object, however, was defeatd by my prevailing upon the Church to withdraw Mr. N—'s name from the vote of censure. He was, therefore, at full liberty to attend whenever the general question came before them. They well knew that on this point they had not one able to cope with him in argument. He would not fail to detect their sophistry, and expose the absurdity of introducing those *make weight* items in their vote of censure. With respect to the book itself, which was the *chief ground*, without losing time in contending with them on the principle, he would readily shew that, even supposing that they were right and that I was wrong respecting the subject in dispute, yet, being a matter of inferior moment, a sentiment on which good men of our own denomination, as well as of other denominations have differed, and do differ, they could not cut me off on that ground, without committing an act of flagrant injustice,

and thereby exposing themselves to the contempt, if not the execration of the religious public. Of all this they were fully aware.

It was necessary to introduce the book in the first instance, because there was then nothing else on which to fix a vote of censure; but my imprudence had (unhappily for me) furnished them with another ground, which they were determined not to quit. The book, therefore, with all the items annexed to it, was at once lost sight of; and thus, by a sudden change of scene, the difficulties necessarily connected with the original question were completely set aside.

Nothing now was talked of but my attack on Mr. U—'s character. This was the topic of conversation in every circle, to which he or his friends had access. The minds of his own people were peculiarly inflamed, and they acted accordingly; as if they conceived that the strength of their affection to their pastor was to be estimated by their virulence against me. Under these circumstances, it was comparatively easy to efface from their minds the impression evidently made by the concessions which I offered at the Church-meeting. It was only to suggest that those concessions were a mere trick in order to evade their censure:—that there was no sincerity in them; and that they ought not to be admitted, &c.

The appointment of messengers to converse with me, &c. afforded them the opportunity, by giving them time, which they well knew how to occupy, for this purpose. In a business of this description, the choice of messengers is of great importance. That this idea was not overlooked when the original vote of censure was passed, appears from the persons selected

on that occasion. One of them (Mr. B—) had distinguished himself by his opposition to us, when we gave our reasons for declining to speak before them as a Church, agreeably to their request. He was indeed the only one (Mr. S— excepted) from whom we had any thing to apprehend in the way of argument. The other messenger was a person, whose ill will I had incurred some years ago by the freedom with which I spoke my sentiments on his conduct in one particular instance. For taking this liberty he has never forgiven me to the present hour. Of this, his constant deportment towards me, whenever we happen to meet, affords sufficient proof. He therefore (though a man of no abilities) might be depended on as it respects disposition. There could be no doubt of his concurring in any proposal that might tend to my prejudice.

Such were the *Dramatis Personæ*. We are next to see how they performed; for the Church, not being able to find instruments better adapted to their purpose, were pleased to consign this business, as well as the former, to their management.

The next evening after my interview with Mr. U— I was waited upon by the messengers, according to appointment. Mr. B— was the chief speaker. He stated the nature of the offence, and the displeasure of the Church; adding that I had *expressed* regret, &c. but that the charges which I had exhibited against Mr. U— furnished no evidence of my sincerity. I then repeated in their presence the acknowledgments which I had made to Mr. U— the night before, requesting that they would communicate to the Church my sincere contrition; and that I asked their pardon for the pain I had given them, and deeply regretted the

offence which I had committed; and that, as it regarded Mr. U— as a Minister,—the Church collectively,—and the cause at large.

With respect to the apparent inconsistency between those concessions, and my conduct at the Church-meeting, in exhibiting such things against Mr. U—, I begged them to consider the peculiar circumstances in which I then stood. Mr. U— had called the meeting for the express purpose of having an opportunity to vindicate his character from the supposed charges, couched under the expressions which I had used on the former evening; and the Church was assembled for the purpose of hearing such vindication. Had I, under these circumstances, refused to state what was upon my mind when the words were uttered, I should have offended both Mr. U— and the Church by such refusal, more perhaps than by any other part of my conduct. It therefore seemed to me, that the only thing I could do with propriety, was to state the facts, and leave them to judge:—that I certainly supposed they would decide, that the facts which I had stated by no means warranted the very strong language which I had used; in which case, I was prepared to submit to their censure. This was all I could do, and all as I conceived which they could desire me to do.

You are anxious to hear what effect all this produced on the minds of the messengers. Alas! alas! my dear friend, their minds, it was too evident, were completely made up on the business before they called upon me. All that I could say, therefore, was in this respect utterly useless, or rather worse than useless; for they seemed to estimate every thing I advanced according to the well known rule of Inverse Proportion, where less

requires more and more less; so that the more I laboured to prove my sincerity, the less they were disposed to believe it.

We are now to attend these same messengers to the following Church-meeting, which was held March 16th. After the former minutes were disposed of, and my business brought forward, the messengers were requested to deliver their report. I was about to retire into the vestry; but was called back on Mr. B— saying that I *might* stop, and hear the report of the messengers; after which it would be *proper* for me to withdraw. Their report (as delivered by Mr. B—) was to the following purport: "That they had waited on me, and had conveyed in the best terms they could, the reproof of the Church; that I had made the most *ample and appropriate concessions;* and had expressed the deepest regret on account of those expressions which had given offence to the Church;—that I considered them as sinful in the sight of God;—as an offence against Mr. U— in particular, and the Church in general; and as likely to produce injury to the cause at large."

When Mr. B— had done, he appealed to me if the account he had given was correct. I said it certainly was: but that I wished to know if they had any thing *to add;* or if what I had just heard was to be considered as *the whole of their report.* He replied that what he had delivered was *the whole of the report.* He just dropped a hint, intimating that some things had passed in conversation which *it did not then appear necessary to mention.* After this I withdrew.

I had no sooner retired than Mr. B— (as I have since been informed) began with stating, that having dis-

charged his duty, as a *messenger*, by making his *report*, he now felt it incumbent on him, to perform his duty as a *member*, in giving his *opinion*. In doing this, he adverted to what had passed in conversation; alluding to those things which, while I was present, *it did not appear necessary to mention*. The supposed inconsistency between the charges I had exhibited against Mr. U— at the former meeting, and the concessions they had just heard, was to him, a sufficient proof of my insincerity. The other messenger confirmed what he advanced, and the Church, those of them at least that were present, (for it was a very thin meeting) were very ready to adopt the same sentiment. With them, it seems, the *opinion* of these men in their private capacity as *members*, was of far more weight than their *report*, as *messengers*. The reason is obvious: the former was favorable to their wishes; the latter was not.

The spirit by which they were actuated, began to manifest itself, before the conclusion of the first prayer. The person by whom it was offered up, (one of the deacons) could not prevail upon himself to close his petitions, without giving thanks to God, for delivering their pastor *out of the mouth of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear**. The temper with which the debate was conducted from first to last, (as I am told) was perfectly congenial with that kind of devotion with which it was introduced. Bitter invectives were employed, and gross calumnies, which had no foundation in truth, were asserted without scruple. According to the representation made to me of the scene then ex-

* It was not till after this prayer was finished, that those who were not members, were requested (according to the usual custom) to withdraw.

hibited. I cannot give you a more just idea of it, than by directing your attention to Mr. Bunyan's account of the conversation that took place among the *Gentlemen of the Jury* empannelled on the trial of Faithful, previous to their giving their verdict.

You may suppose that my friend N—, who was present the whole time, was not an indifferent spectator on this occasion. He could not but feel deeply affected; and knowing that he himself (though not as yet under censure) was the original object, and would certainly fall the next victim of their resentment, he determined not to spare them. He therefore reprobated their conduct in the severest terms. He contrasted the violent temper of this *thin* meeting, with the conciliatory disposition so apparent in the former *full* meeting, and then asked, Why messengers were appointed, when I was present, ready to answer any questions they might propose, or make any concessions they might require, with the whole case completely before them? He pressed this matter so closely, that at length Mr. B— said "*It was to gain time.*" Here the mask dropped off, and their real design was manifest.

The former meeting (as already observed) was a very full one. Many were present who were not in the habit of attending Church-meetings, drawn together partly by curiosity, and partly from motives of affection to their pastor, to hear the charges that were to be exhibited against him. These were quite rejoiced to find his character cleared, and the charges considered as destitute of foundation. They would therefore (at least while that impression lasted) have chearfully acquiesced in receiving any concessions, by which the breach might be closed, and the whole buried in oblivion. Not so their rulers. Their object was my exclusion.

That object, however, could not, under existing circumstances, be carried into immediate effect. *Time* was necessary to prepare the people for the accomplishment of their design. The appointment of messengers whom they could trust, gave them all they wanted. Previous to the following Church-meeting, they had sufficient opportunity to feel the pulse of their friends; and those who were not fully disposed to adopt their views might be prevailed on to keep away, for the sake of preserving the peace of the Church, and preventing the appearance of division.

Had you been present at this meeting, and witnessed the temper and spirit with which it was conducted, you might easily have seen the design they had in view. Brother N— saw it, and was determined to expose them. He therefore further asked, If messengers must be appointed, why *such* messengers? It was always understood that the appointment of messengers was with a view to *restore* a fallen brother; and that in the spirit of meekness. (See Gal. vi. 1.) If the object of the Church, in this instance, was to *restore*, they had certainly chosen very improper persons: if, on the other hand, their intention was to *ruin*, they could not have selected fitter instruments. Mr. N— confirmed the truth of this assertion by referring to the facts which have been already noticed, the truth of which they were unable to deny. He told them, moreover, that he considered both himself and me as persecuted for conscience sake. You will probably be of opinion that my friend manifested an improper spirit, and acted in an unbecoming manner on this occasion. If you were to tell him so, he would not be offended, as he has himself frankly acknowledged the same, and expressed his regret on the account. But if

you knew what sort of spirits he had to contend with on this occasion, (though nothing can justify that which is improper) you would be very moderate in your censure.

Being called in, during the discussion, to answer a question that was proposed to me, I availed myself of the opportunity to fulfil the promise I had made to Mr. U—, to repeat my concessions to the Church at their next meeting. Having done this, I again retired into the vestry.

At the close of the debate, I understand Mr. B— produced a card, which he brought with him in his pocket, containing a resolution, *ready written*, in which, after specifying the nature of my offence, and acknowledging that the concessions I had made were *ample and appropriate*, it was stated that some parts of my conduct (referring to the charges against Mr. U—, of which so much has been said) not corresponding with such concessions, they were under the necessity, as a Church, of withdrawing from me, till it should please God to give me repentance, and convince me of the impropriety of my conduct, &c. They ought rather to have said; till it should please God to grant *them* repentance, and convince *them* of the impropriety of *their* conduct; for no repentance or concession of mine would avail any thing, unless a change of mind was produced in *them*. If the shadow of a doubt could exist respecting this assertion, at the period to which I refer, subsequent events have established the truth of it, beyond all possible contradiction.

This motion being passed, I was called in to hear the result; when Mr. U—, instead of reading the resolution to me, addressed me in nearly the following words:

"Brother E—, I am desired to inform you, that the Church have considered *all* the circumstances of your case, and have directed me to say, that they do *deliberately* withdraw from you, and therefore you are no longer a member of this Church." I immediately retired*.

After I was gone, Mr. N— stated, that circumstanced as he then was, he could not think of continuing among them, as neither his own comfort or theirs could be promoted thereby. He therefore begged to know if they had any objection to grant him a dismission to another Church, as *he* was not then under censure on any ground. This question they were not prepared for: it came upon them unawares. They were determined, however, not to answer it in the affirmative, and the conversation to which it gave rise, sufficiently proves what was the disposition of their minds towards Mr. N—, and fully justifies those observations which I have already made on that subject. (see page 26.) The general opinion was, that one was as bad as the other; that he had taken my part throughout; and that as I was condemned, he ought not to be acquitted. These vague assertions, however, amounted to nothing. The question was asked, and an immediate answer demanded: Had they any objection to grant Mr. N— a dismission? If they had not, let them say so at once. If they had, let them state what it was. They were, therefore, obliged to bring forward some specific charge, or let him go free. After hunting about some time for this purpose, Mr. U— said, he thought there was *no neces-*

* It is usual with him, on such occasions, to say "*deliberately, and in the fear of God.*" Whether he felt a little qualm of conscience on this occasion, is not for me to say; but it is certain that the words "*in the fear of God,*" were omitted.

sity for going back further than the present meeting. Mr. N— had stigmatized the messengers, (meaning the messengers sent to me) and reflected on the Church. A vote of censure was accordingly passed to that effect, and messengers appointed to reprove him for so doing.

Some difficulties having occurred in the choice of messengers, Mr. N— told them, they were only losing time, for that let them appoint whom they would, he certainly did not mean to see them ; he conceived that all the mischief arose from these *go betweens,* and therefore he wished to have nothing to do with them: if he had said or done any thing improper, he was there upon the spot to answer for himself, which was all that they could reasonably require. This, however, was not what they wanted. They were, therefore, determined to pursue the plan, which they had already found so admirably adapted to answer their purpose.

I remain, &c.

LETTER VI.

DEAR SIR,

I closed my last letter with informing you of the proceedings of the Church relative to Mr. N—, and the difficulty they experienced in finding materials for a vote of censure. You will recollect that they were taken by surprize, and had not the op-

portunity (as on all former occasions) of privately consulting together, and choosing the best ground which their united wisdom could suggest for the purpose they meant to accomplish. It should seem that when they came to reflect upon the business, they were not perfectly satisfied with that which they had fixed on; conceiving, as they well might, that it was scarcely strong enough to bear the vote of exclusion which they meant to rest upon it. They, therefore, set to work, without delay, to strengthen it, in the best manner they were able, with fresh materials of accusation, if such could be collected together within the allotted period.

About this time, a circumstance occurred which appeared very favorable to their views. In an interview which Mr. N— had with Messrs. H— and I— (two respectable ministers) he took occasion to mention the conduct of Mr. U—'s Church towards us, which he reprobated in the severest terms. He particularly noticed the inconsistency of Mr. U—, in professing so much zeal for the work of itinerant preaching, while he was persecuting those who were engaged in it. He added, that if the Baptists, as a body, did not bear a public and decided testimony against such unchristian proceedings, it would fix an indelible reproach upon the whole denomination. This soon reached the ears of Mr. U—, who seized upon it with eagerness, and not only reported it to the Church at their next meeting, but actually entered it on the minutes of the Church book; *after which*, he prevailed upon the Church to suspend their proceedings against Mr. N—, till he had enquired into the truth of it, which he engaged to do before they met again. At the time of their next regular Church-meeting, the place was shut

up for repairs, which occasioned the delay of another month.

In the interim, some very respectable friends of Mr. N— interposed, and one or two interviews took place between him and Mr. U—, in the presence of those friends; the immediate effect of which was rather to widen the breach than close it. The business however did not end here. One of the gentlemen above alluded to (Mr. G—) kindly undertook the office of mediator, and at length succeeded in prevailing upon Mr. N— to make concessions to the Church in writing, respecting any intemperate expressions used by him, which either the Church or Mr. U— might consider as an occasion of offence. The following is an exact copy:

To the Church of Christ, under the pastoral care of Mr. U—.

CHRISTIAN FRIENDS,

From a sincere desire to repair the breach that has been made, and to heal the wound that has been given, I feel disposed to acknowledge the impropriety of the spirit and temper which I have manifested on various occasions, when the principles on which I have differed from my friends have been the subject of discussion; particularly on the last Church-meeting at which I was present, and in the subsequent interviews which I have had with Mr. U—. I do freely confess that I have, at the period referred to, expressed myself in a way which I now see to be extremely improper. I do sincerely regret that I have given occasion of offence to Mr. U— and to the Church.

In whatever light this confession may be viewed by others, I feel a satisfaction in making it thus publicly, as a testimony of the excellence of those principles which I profess to consider as the ground of my hope, and which, if I had felt the full effect of them at the time, would have dictated a different line of conduct. I hope that this concession will be received as it is meant. It is my sincere wish that all former occasions of contention may be buried in oblivion, and all future ones avoided. Knowing, however, the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of my own heart, instead of making protestations respecting my future conduct, I earnestly intreat the prayers of my friends, that I may be enabled at all times to act as becometh the gospel of Christ; and can assure them, that in whatever situation I may hereafter be placed, it is my desire not to forget them at a throne of grace, but that the spiritual prosperity both of the pastor and people may ever be near my heart.

In testimony whereof I subscribe the above declaration, this 11th day of June, 1807.

J. N—.

I was given to understand at the same time that it was Mr. G—'s wish that I should renew my concessions, and send them in writing to the Church, which I accordingly did, as follows.

To the Church of Christ, &c.

CHRISTIAN FRIENDS,

I beg leave to express to you my deep regret, that any part of my conduct has incurred the displeasure of the Church, and procured my exclusion

therefrom. With respect to the offence for which I am cut off, I have already acknowledged it both in public and in private. I can assure you that I did so, from a full conviction that it was sinful in the sight of God:—that it was calculated to injure the character of your pastor;—to disturb the peace of the Church, and to bring discredit on the cause at large. I trust I can appeal to a heart-searching God for my sincerity in again repeating these acknowledgments.

I wish also to add that whereinsoever I have, on any occasion, manifested a temper and spirit unbecoming the christian character, particularly in the discussions which have recently taken place in the Church, I do hereby express my regret for the same, and do further solicit to be again received into the Church. In making this request, I trust I am actuated solely by a sense of the duty which I owe both to myself and to the Church. I have repeatedly committed the matter to God in prayer. I have sought and I hope enjoyed his forgiveness. I now request yours, and leave my case in your hands, praying that you may be directed to do that which is right in the sight of God, and I can truly add, that peace and prosperity may always attend you.

I remain, &c.

12 *June*, 1807. J. E—.

From the conversation which took place between Mr. G— and Mr. U— on the subject, there was every reason to believe that by these means a reconciliation might be effected, and that we might have an honourable dismission to another Church. When this plan was mentioned to Mr. U— he signified his entire appro-

bation of it, and seemed to interest himself in its accomplishment; for he took the pains to wait on Mr. P— (an intimate friend of Mr. N— by whose kind interference Mr. G— was first induced to take up the matter) to make him acquainted with the proposal; expressing at the same time an earnest desire that a reconciliation should take place between us both and the Church.

If the affection which he then expressed for us was sincere, I can only say that it was of very short continuance. His goodness (in this respect) was like the morning cloud and early dew, which quickly pass away; or, like Jonah's gourd, which came up in a night, and perished in a night. He had, indeed, reasons sufficient to induce him to wish for a reconciliation, which might pave the way for the honourable dismission of us both. The odium which the Church had incurred by their conduct towards me in cutting me off, after they had acknowledged that my concessions were *ample and appropriate,* was so great, that not a soul could be found (out of their own Church) who would justify their proceedings, upon a fair representation of the business. He might, therefore, well wish for a reconciliation, which would wipe out the disgrace, and bury the whole in oblivion. Not so his deacons. Nothing short of exclusion, and that with all possible ignominy, would satisfy them. As for the odium that might attach to such proceedings, they gave themselves little or no concern about it. Their names, they well knew, were of too little account to be mentioned out of their own narrow circle. It was Mr. U—'s Church, and not theirs; and the disgrace, whether more or less, would fall upon him, and not upon them. They were determined, therefore, to pursue their plan at all events. What could poor

Mr. U— do under these circumstances? If the concessions were not received, how could he hold up his face to Messrs. G— and P—, after not only acquiescing in the proposal, but even *soliciting* that such concessions should be sent. On the other hand, what hope could he entertain that the Church would receive them, if *all* the deacons set their faces against it; especially after that high degree of irritation which had been excited in the minds of the people against us.

Mr. U— now found himself completely between Scylla and Charybdis, and saw no way of evading the difficulties that encompassed him on either side, but by attempting (as he has frequently done on similar occasions) to steer a middle course. The only method to accomplish this was, in conjunction with Mr. S—, to persuade the Church to receive our concessions. Mr. S— had no objection to this, *provided he might afterwards introduce the question concerning the book*, which was originally his own motion, and which he was resolved not to give up. It might not be amiss to remark here, that Mr. S— was out of town, when I was cut off on the particular question; and it has been said, that he was not altogether satisfied with the conduct of the Church in that business. Be this as it may; Mr. U— had now no alternative but to agree with Mr. S— on his own terms. Resolutions were accordingly prepared for the next Church meeting. Thus the matter was settled between them, and so they wrapped it up.

When the Church were met (in June) our concessions were produced and read. Messrs. U— and S— now employed all their eloquence to prevail on the Church to receive them. Having reason and scripture on their

side, they at length succeeded; and the majority was clearly in favor of receiving the concessions. Mr. S— then brought forward a motion to this effect:—That messengers be appointed to wait on Mr. N—, to ascertain how far he is concerned in *the book*. He also introduced a resolution respecting me, importing that my concessions were received and accepted, *as far as they went*; but that they must have further satisfaction respecting *the book*, before they could comply with my request, to be readmitted to their communion. These resolutions were likewise passed. The latter, I understand, Mr. U— was requested to send me a copy of, as no messengers were appointed to me at that time.

Messrs. U— and S— now seemed to carry all before them; but their triumph was of very short duration. The other three deacons, not being previously consulted, were very much hurt, and indeed totally dissatisfied with the proceedings on this occasion. They had frequently been disgusted with the overbearing spirit of Mr. S—; but this was beyond every thing. They were now reduced to mere cyphers, and might be consulted or not, just as Mr. U— and Mr. S— thought proper. With these feelings, they determined to renounce their office, as it seemed Messrs. U— and S— could do as well without them as with them.

This resolution they carried into effect at the next Church-meeting. You can more easily conceive than I can describe the consternation into which the Church was thrown by this event. They had neither leisure nor inclination to enter upon our business at that meeting. The sudden and unexpected resignation of three of the deacons out of four on the same evening, was quite enough to occupy them. Messengers were

immediately appointed, to endeavour to effect a reconciliation, and the Church adjourned for one week only.

At the adjourned meeting, the messengers reported, That they had waited upon the deacons, agreeably to the request of the Church, and had prevailed upon them to resume their office. An explanation of this mysterious transaction was called for, but none could be obtained. After this, one of the messengers appointed to Mr. N— reported, that he was requested by Mr. N— to beg the favor of the Church to send him a copy of those resolutions which respected him, and he would send his answer in writing. Upon which, Mr. S— moved, That nothing should be sent to Mr. N— in writing, and nothing be received from him in writing. This resolution being passed, Mr. S— contrived to get himself appointed one of the messengers to interrogate Mr. N— respecting *the book*. You will recollect that this same Mr. S— waited on me before the original vote of censure was brought in, for the purpose of ascertaining who was the author of the book: and that I told him in the most explicit terms that I was the sole author; notwithstanding which, he could not forbear including Mr. N—'s name in his vote of censure, and persisted in retaining it for a considerable time, though he afterwards consented to withdraw it. Still, however, he could not relinquish the idea in his own mind. So far from it, that he actually said at the Church-meeting, "that if Mr. N— were to declare to him that he had no hand in the book, he would not believe him." This will probably remind you of a distich in Butler's Hudibras:

"A man convinc'd against his will
Is of the same opinion still."

I leave you to judge whether *such a man* is a proper person to be appointed a messenger, in a case where he has completely made up his mind, respecting the object of the message before he has seen the party. Besides, had not this subject been fully discussed before? Had I not declared in the presence of them all, that I was the sole author? And had not the Church to all intents and purposes admitted the truth of this declaration, and exonerated Mr. N— from the charge, by agreeing to leave his name out of the vote of censure? By the laws of our country no man can be tried a second time, for the same offence of which he has been once acquitted. Does not their conduct to Mr. N— on this occasion, shew a determination to pick a quarrel with him. When he has, by his concessions, removed every other ground of offence, they will go back to that which they themselves had given up before, rather than part with him upon honorable terms.

Mr. N—, on being apprized of their proceedings towards him, wrote the following letter to Mr. U—.

Dear Sir,

When I sent those concessions to the Church, which were read at a former Church-meeting, I indulged the hope that they would be received as they were meant; that all former occasions of contention might be buried in oblivion, and all future ones avoided. Since, however, that effect has not been produced, and a fresh subject of dispute has been taken up by the Church, I feel it my duty to put a final termination to this unpleasant business, by declining to enter into any controversy with the Church, either by word or writing. I am induced to take this step, from a regard

not only to my own peace, but to the peace of the Church, and the cause of religion, which has already been deeply injured by these continued altercations. It is my wish quietly to withdraw, without giving any further trouble. I shall, therefore, no longer consider myself a member of the Church under your care, and beg you will have the goodness to intimate the same to them, at their next meeting. Wishing you every blessing,

I remain, &c.

August 4, 1807. J. N—.

Mr. N— was induced to take this step from a desire to put an end to a controversy, which, contrary to his wishes, had been protracted for nearly six months; and might upon the plan they seemed determined to pursue, be continued for six months more. To proceed further in it, he clearly saw, would only be to multiply transgression, and add sin to sin; as it was now sufficiently evident, that they were resolved under one pretence or other, to exclude him as they had already excluded me. I should observe that though the three deacons had consented to resume their office, they did not think proper to resume their attendance at Church-meetings, till after the conclusion of our business; of which I propose to give you an account in my next.

Before I close, permit me just to remark, that throughout the whole of this affair, we have never attempted to make a party, or excite division. We have not endeavoured to influence the mind of any one member, or obtain a single vote in our favor. No, my friend, all their divisions have originated among themselves; among those who never seemed more cordially

united in any thing they ever engaged in, than in their enmity and opposition to us; though even there, as you have already seen, they could not agree as to the mode they should adopt, to attain the object they had so much at heart.

I am, &c.

LETTER VII.

DEAR SIR,

I am, at length, enabled to give you the final conclusion of the affair which has been so long in agitation. You will recollect that in June, 1807, the Church adopted the resolutions which were moved by Mr. S—, importing that they were satisfied with our concessions as far as they went, but requiring from us both, some further satisfaction about the book. (See page 56.) At the Church-meeting in August they resolved, in the first place, To cut off Mr. N— for refusing to see the messengers, who were sent to interrogate him about the book. Their second resolution was, That it would not consist with the peace of the Church to restore me. On each of these resolutions I propose offering a few remarks.

First, with respect to my friend N—. According to their views of Church government in his case, it appears that if a man refuses to see messengers who are his bitterest foes, and come to him for the sole purpose of seeking occasion against him, he ought to be held up to all the world as one who is unworthy of Christian fellowship. They withdraw from him, "till it shall please God to give him repentance." They make no

scruple to place him on a level with the drunkard, the adulterer, and the thief. If this were generally known, it must certainly tend to prevent those who have any regard to their character and comfort from uniting with them. Here is a man who sees his friend cut off on *the opinion of messengers* in direct opposition to their *report*. He takes the warning which the case is so well calculated to afford, and refuses to see such messengers. But does he deny any reasonable satisfaction to the Church? So far from it, he offers them every explanation of his words and actions, when he is present among them; and when he is absent, he only requires to have their resolutions in writing, and promises to return his answer in writing also. But this they will not accede to. This mode would effectually frustrate the design which they had conceived, and which could only be carried into effect by the help of such messengers. I trust, however, that every unbiassed mind will approve the step he has taken, and condemn their proceedings with respect to him.

Secondly, with regard to me. Here the impropriety and the absurdity of their conduct will further appear. In June, they accepted my concessions, and resolved to take up the book again. A copy of this resolution should have been sent to me, which, however, was never done. Without revoking or rescinding this resolution, or obtaining any new light on the subject, they pass, in the month of August, another resolution, importing, "That it would not consist with the peace of the Church to restore me."

The conduct of the messengers who conveyed this resolution to me was exactly of a piece with the rest. Their message was as follows: "That the Church had

received my letter, and were much gratified with the temper and spirit which it discovered; but that it did not consist with the peace of the Church to comply with my request." (See my letter page 53.) It was very natural for me to enquire *what reason* they might assign for their refusal; and especially after being officially informed, that they were much gratified with the temper and spirit in which my request was made. I did so; but they would not assign any reason whatever. I pressed them very closely on this subject, and varied my question in different ways; but their uniform reply was, "We cannot tell; we have *no authority* to give any answer." I told them, I considered this a very extraordinary message. I was *ostensibly* cut off for certain expressions. I sent in concessions which were received and accepted; and yet, they would neither restore me, nor give any reason why they would not. One of them here said, "No, we have no authority to say that the concessions were accepted." I then asked them both officially, whether they were accepted or not. "We cannot tell; we have no authority to say that they were." I next asked them, in a manner equally close, whether they would *deny* that my apology was accepted, or if they would affirm *that it was not.* Still the reply was, "We cannot tell; we have no authority to give any answer." I then told them that I must certainly understand that the Church did not choose to assign any reason, why they did not comply with my request; and therefore it was for me to make my own use of it.

From the conduct of the messengers, I proceed to comment upon that of the Church. Their vote of exclusion stated that it was to continue "till it should please

God to grant me repentance." Their message informs me that they were "*much gratified with the temper and spirit*" which were manifested in my letter: i. e. that they were really satisfied with the concessions, as to the matter to which they related. And I apprehend that every impartial person who reads my letter, (see page 53) and considers all that has been stated on the subject, will conclude that this *temper and spirit*" was no other than that very repentance which they required, and consequently that they *ought* to be satisfied with it, and to put a final close to the business in an honorable way. But plain dealing (at least in this affair) is no characteristic of theirs. They cannot, they dare not deny that they have accepted my concessions; and yet they keep me in a state of exclusion, *without assigning any reason whatever*; except a vague and indefinite declaration that it would not consist with the peace of the Church to restore me.

But I think I can assign a reason for their conduct in this instance, which will at once unravel the plot, and develope the whole of their proceedings. Our final exclusion appears to me to be THE PRICE of that *reconciliation*, which took place so suddenly among the deacons. This reconciliation is involved in mystery on every other principle; but this idea will furnish a clue to it. Only suppose the matter to stand thus. The three deacons refuse to resume their office, either if we are re-admitted, or if the book is again taken up. Mr. S— is obliged to give way, and they agree to exclude us both, in the manner before mentioned. On this principle their return to office may easily be accounted for, as well as their refusing to give any reason (either to me or to the Church) how or why my resto-

ration would affect their peace. To give the true reason would not answer their purpose, and to assign any other was impossible.

I beg you will observe the curious situation in which Mr. S— appears on this occasion. When our concessions were received, he laboured hard to persuade the Church to accept them, in order that he might have an opportunity of displaying his powers of argument and eloquence in his attack on the book. No doubt he had marked all those passages which he considered exceptionable, and was fully prepared for th encounter. The *call of a Church* would be quite safe in his hands. He would shew his admiring hearers that it lay hid in a number of texts which had totally escaped the notice of superficial observers; but which appeared quite plain to his penetrating genius. And the *authority of the Chu h*, to limit the exercise of talents would be so clearly laid down, that none would henceforward presume to become " public instructors " without first asking heir leave. What a sad disappointment then must it be, when these expectations were frustrated by the refusal of the other deacons to acquiesce in his proposal! In consequence of this, he suddenly veers about, and becomes the principal actor in procuring the vote of the Church to continue my exclusion, without again recurring to the book, or taking up any fresh matter against me.

But let me now advert to the dilemma in which they are placed. We have uniformly asserted, and do now affirm, that the book (together with our denial of their authority in this case) was the *real* ground of my exclusion, and that the words which I uttered (though doubtless a proper object of Church censure) were made the pretext to avoid the shame which must otherwise have

speedily overtaken them. On the other hand, they have always insisted that my exclusion was *totally unconnected with the book.* Which of these two positions will they *now* take? Will they *admit* that the book has lain at the bottom of their proceedings ever since it was published? If they do, what credit is due to all their former denials of it, both in public and in private?

If they still *deny* such connexion, how will they account for recurring to the book when the other ground was removed, and also for my not being restored? Nothing appears on the face of their proceedings, but that the peace of the Church would be affected. But does this refer to any thing in *me?* If so, it should have been stated, that it might be clearly understood. Or does it not rather refer to *themselves,* and therefore shew that the reason I have assigned for our exclusion is the true one, although they dare not avow it.

As the case now stands, they have placed themselves in this dilemma, and I will venture to say they can never escape from it. It would really be curious to hear the reasons which they *separately* assign for our exclusion. On the one hand, those who were always for expelling us on account of the book, would most likely admit that it was somehow or other connected with the exclusion. But those who were against receiving our concessions would, to preserve their own consistency, positively deny it. Such are the discordant principles on which they have acted in this affair.

Thus have I brought my long narrative to a close. In my next and last letter, I propose to recapitulate the leading features of it. Meanwhile believe me,

Yours, &c.

LETTER VIII.

DEAR SIR,

Agreeably to the intimation given at the close of my last letter, I now sit down to present you with a brief sketch of the principal features in our case, in order that you may have them before you at one view.

In consequence of our being employed by the London Itinerant Society, the Church to which we belonged thought proper to interfere, and by their messengers to request us to speak before them *as a Church,* in order that they might judge of our abilities, &c. We told them in reply, that it was a matter of conscience with us, not to acknowledge the authority of the Church in this case. and consequently that we could not comply with their request, without sinning against God. This denial of their authority *is the root,* from which have sprung all their proceedings against us. First, they pass a string of resolutions *permitting* us to do that which they never had the power to prevent, i. e. preach in the villages. They accompany this *extraordinary boon* to us, with laying unwarrantable restrictions upon the consciences of others. We remonstrate against their proceedings; but this being of no avail, we determine to leave the Church.

Difficulties being started in the way of our admission to another Church, we are at length obliged to appeal to the public on the principle. (See page 22.)

The next step is their indictment on the ground of the book. Our case comes then to be argued before

those who had all the *power* in their own hands, and sustained, at the same time, the various characters of party, accuser, witness, judge, and executioner. In the course of the *trial*, hasty and intemperate language is used. Of this a full explanation is given, and the most "ample and appropriate" concessions made, both in public and in private. A report to that effect is delivered to the Church. In the very face of that report, I am excluded, and charges, nearly similar, brought agains Mr. N—. While these are pending, some respectable friends interpose; further concessions are given, and Mr. U— professes an eager desire for reconciliation. No sooner, however, were those concessions received, than the original ground of the book is again revived. Upon this subject, the deacons take different sides, and quarrel among themselves. On a sudden, they are apparently reconciled, and we are finally excluded, in the way I have already stated.

And now, my dear friend, what has been the result of this long contest, and what the conclusion of the whole matter? As opposite to the views and designs of the first c ntrivers of the plot, as light is opposite to darkness. You have seen the various means by which they have attempted to accomplish their purpose, and how they have been foiled in every one of them. The final issue, as it respects the original ground of dispute, affords us as complete a triumph as we could desire. The sentiment of a Church's call, which many have been accustomed to regard with indifference, as a mere speculative point, appears from the facts which I have laid before you, to be no other than an engine of mischief, which cannot be employed (except by mutual consent) without violating the spirit of the gospel. This

is a fatal stab to the principle;—such a stab as it can never recover. It may die a lingering death, but it must certainly expire; and any attempt of its friends to restore it, especially if it be by applying violent remedies, in its present weak and languishing state, will only tend to hasten its dissolution.

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Theological and Biblical Magazine for April, 1807.

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